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THE NEW YORK BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

BY GEORGE B. HOPKINS,
Trustee of the Bureau.

When the New York Bureau of Municipal Research was started people said, "You can never get efficiency standards accepted by New York." After several borough presidents had been "recalled" via removal on evidence of inefficiency, "albeit," as Governor Hughes said, "there is no evidence of personal corruption;" after accounting revision was started for all departments; after the period of public interest in budget making lengthened from two days to six months; after health work for children was reorganized, people began to say, "Oh, you can do such things in New York, but you can never make such methods work in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Hoboken, etc." Yet, in January, 1912, Mayor Blankenburg, of Philadelphia, and Mayor Hunt, of Cincinnati, stated publicly that they believed the recent reform waves in their cities would "make good" because they started, as previous reform waves had never started, with a vast amount of definite information with respect to the city's business methods and with the promise of continuing co-operation of an informed citizen agency working through health, school, accounting, engineering and other research experts.

Just because municipal research concerns itself with methods rather than with men, just because it operates impersonally through discovering and publishing facts, it promises to be just as successful in one place as in another. Because there are more cities with fewer than 100,000 population, I shall cite concrete results that are reported from the expenditure of \$4,000 a year during 1910 and 1911 for the City of Hoboken, N. J., with a population of 70,000. Mrs. Robert L. Stevens was considering various alternatives—a wing to a hospital, a day nursery, etc., for a memorial to her husband. An officer of the Bureau of Municipal Research was asked on which he would spend \$2,500 a year. He replied, "Neither." When a substitute was demanded he replied, "Brains." Mrs. Stevens finally set aside \$4,000 a year for a three-year test to be administered by the Bureau of Municipal Research in co-operation with the people of Hoboken to

"increase year after year the number of mothers and fathers who will take an interest in Hoboken's city government." In two years this fund,

1. Employed a nurse who, after visiting 515 families in the interest of school children with physical defects needing attention, and 300 families in the interest of sick babies, has been regularly employed by the board of education.

2. Conducted a campaign on the summer care of babies which resulted in the employment by the board of health of two visiting nurses and a milk inspector.

3. With the Board of Education held a dental hygiene exhibit, which hastened the opening of a dental clinic for school children.

4. Made the investigation and promoted the legislation which led to state-wide supervision of weights and measures.

5. To guide charter making, published a digest of the laws and ordinances pertaining to the powers and duties of city officials.

6. Published a directory of charitable and civic agencies.

7. With the Board of Trade gave a largely attended budget exhibit, and, in addition, arranged a budget Sunday and budget hearings.

8. Disclosed a deficit of over \$300,000 in sinking fund provisions, and proposed a plan for adequate future treatment.

9. Emphasized the need for proper and adequate accounting methods for the city's business which the three candidates for mayor in 1911 pledged themselves to introduce.

10. Effected savings in the bills for public printing, purchase of supplies, etc., and showed where and how thousands of dollars could be saved yearly. (The one local daily newspaper's refusal to print facts about government was turned into an important asset by competing papers which gave publicity.)

11. Arranged a charter conference for January 3, 1912, between Governor Wilson and the mayors and corporation attorneys of twenty New Jersey cities.

12. Took the preparation of an administrative code in collaboration with the committees appointed by the governor.

13. Assisted the Board of Education and other civic bodies in the organization of a school extension committee.

14. With the State Federation of Women's Clubs and the commissioner of education has outlined a state-wide study by women's

clubs of the public schools as to medical inspection, promotion and retardation and sanitation.

15. Set an example which has affected nearly all Jersey cities which are more convinced by Hoboken's experience than by New York's, because Hoboken seemed less hopeful than they.

Viewing this work from a distance the editor of the *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston) recently wrote of the municipal research method:

A mountain hamlet may, relatively speaking, be more in need of social reform and uplift than an urban industrial center. . . . A flourishing and outwardly attractive suburb may have as much "graft" in its government as the city where its men earn their incomes and where its women find their amusements and do their shopping. Whether the suburb has honest government or not depends in the last analysis on the same conditions that determine urban probity or venality. . . .

This was conclusively demonstrated in Dobbs Ferry, a New York City suburb, in an election just held. Candidates were forced to assent to or dissent from a clearly defined community program that took a look ahead; to pledge themselves to favor free public discussion by citizens of all proposals involving expenditure of money; to promise to keep town accounts and to make assessments after a plan devised by expert municipal accountants; to establish a local information bureau with facilities for enlightening applicants at any time; and to unite with officials of adjoining towns in campaigns outlined to promote the well-being of all persons in that region of Westchester County.

It is superfluous to remark that even a campaign run on such a plan of tactics would be educational even though reform candidates were at first defeated. But they were elected. What Dobbs Ferry has done other villages can do, especially if, as in this case, women intent on civic uplift are numerous. *The Bureau of Municipal Research lives to serve; and it knows no distinctions based on size of the community applying for aid.*

The following incident illustrates the value of a "continuing memory" among business men to parallel that continuing memory among politicians which has so often proved its effectiveness. It has never before been published, but, as a trustee of the Bureau of Municipal Research, and a friend of several city officials involved, I feel justified in including it in an efficiency number of *THE ANNALS*. At the first meeting of the Fusion-Gaynor Board of Estimate and Apportionment, the first week of January, 1912, nine resolutions were introduced and passed, all looking to the systematizing of city business. For example, they provided for a comprehensive study of

teachers' salaries, for a corporate stock budget, for standardizing salaries, grades, supplies, etc. So businesslike was the meeting that the newspapers featured it with glaring headlines and congratulated taxpayers upon the new standard of public responsibility and foresight shown by the new officials. Every one of those resolutions was suggested to the officials by the Bureau of Municipal Research, immediately after election. Not only were they explained, and justified by facts based upon four years of intimate study of city business, but they were actually typewritten, brown-backed, delivered to the Board-of-Estimate members' baskets on the morning of the meeting, and multigraphed and distributed for use by newspapers. Thus the new administration started higher up and further on its first Friday than its predecessors ended after four years.

Another illustration is typical of the municipal research method and its advantages: After Mr. Prendergast's election as comptroller of New York City, he was told that a certain bureau having twenty-three employees needed thirty more men to do the increased work assigned to it. The comptroller asked for a bill of particulars from those recommending the increase and from the bureau. The bureau's report read:

"The duty of 'John Doe' is to post items from vouchers and warrants into a register or ledger. These operations 'John Doe' made during the months of November and December at the rate of one for every eight minutes. Dividing the number of entries required by the number of entries one man can easily make in one day, fourteen men should do twice as much work as twenty-three men have been doing." Nine men were dropped.

An interesting incident in co-operation was the bureau's help in the selection of an expert staff to install a revised accounting system. The bureau secured the co-operation of various accounting houses in recommending men to Comptroller Metz, then interviewed these men to see which had superior technical qualifications, and reported the facts to the comptroller. While the request for \$40,000 for this special staff was pending, a prominent member of the board of aldermen demanded four of the positions as a condition of his furthering the special revenue bonds. Comptroller Metz replied that the applicant could have the whole \$40,000 if he would have his men meet the qualifications, i. e., at least five years' experience as an accountant plus proof of special competence for this work. The

answer was, "What in blankety-blank-blank could I do with jobs like that on the Bowery?"

After working with the bureau for four years Comptroller Metz established a fund of \$10,000 a year for three years for promoting efficient municipal accounting and reporting in American cities. This fund has been issuing "Short Talks" to city officials which constitute a sort of question and answer department on accounting and reporting matters. These talks have included methods of treating sinking funds, how to make up a budget, the advantage of budget exhibits, etc.¹ The fund will issue shortly a report of a field study by Henry Bruère, director of the bureau, on the way commission government is working in ten commission cities. This was the first study of its kind. Two thousand questions were applied to each city covering (a) survey of the physical condition of the city, (b) conferences with representative citizens of all kinds, and a critical examination of (c) organization, (d) personnel, (e) records, and (f) work methods.

Of this municipal research plan of focusing public attention upon methods and results rather than upon men and parties, and its continuous between-election effort to inform the public regarding public business, Mayor McClellan said:

"The service of the bureau in purely municipal work marks a new departure in city government,—the active co-operation of the public with the city administration."

Governor Hughes said:

"The character of the bureau's investigation to aid administration in city affairs marks one of the most important improvements of recent years. It is striving to get at the facts in an honorable, straightforward way, and is striving to present them so that they will be intelligently comprehended."

Finally, when President Taft secured an appropriation from congress for the commission on economy and efficiency, he chose a director of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research to apply to all national departments the same methods of administrative research which have paid such large dividends wherever tried. Copies of the commission's reports may be had by writing to Dr. F. A. Cleveland, Chairman, White House offices. One of the newest appli-

¹ See "A National Fund for Promoting Efficient Municipal Accounting," by U. L. Leonhauser, Part IV.

cations of the method is a study soon to be finished (by the New York Bureau through the Training School for Public Service) of the public school system of Wisconsin. For this report address State Board of Public Affairs, Madison, Wis., for which the study is being made. The methods and results of municipal research in its home city have been succinctly stated and described in a pamphlet issued in January, 1911, by the New York bureau entitled, "Six Years of Municipal Research for New York City." I am authorized to state that copies of this bulletin may be had by addressing the editor of *THE ANNALS*, or the Bureau of Municipal Research, 261 Broadway, New York City.

Among the larger benefits of the municipal research method that may be duplicated in kind by any city whose public and private agencies will use the same methods should be noted:

1. Establishment of the principle *that the majority has no right to impose wasteful and incompetent government upon the minority*—through the removal by Governor Hughes of Borough President Ahearn on evidence of incompetence and waste first furnished by the bureau, and the later removal of two other borough presidents on evidence from commissioners of accounts and taxpayers agencies.

2. Reorganization of the department of finance with notable improvements in its methods of inspection, audit, payment, collection, reports, etc.

3. Accounting revision for all city departments with beginnings of time sheets and service records as the basis for auditing pay rolls.

4. Budget reform, budget exhibits, budget publicity, budget conferences of social workers, clergymen and taxpayers.

5. Conversion of the commissioners of accounts' office from a handicap to civic progress into a potent agent for efficiency and honesty.

6. An increase of \$2,000,000 a year in revenue due to the reorganization of water collection methods.

7. System and economy substituted for waste and chaos in the repairs and stores methods of the water department and in the purchasing and repair methods of the police department.

8. Establishment of a bureau of child hygiene in the department of health and the extension of its work for school children and infants.

9. Cessation of many slaughter house evils through more efficient inspection by the Department of Health.

10. Recovery of \$848,000 from street railway companies for paving done at public expense between the companies' rails, and suits pending for \$175,000.

11. Correction of abuses in connection with street assessments.

12. Projection of official inquiries into teachers' salaries, standardization of supplies, standardization of salaries and grades, school efficiency, health efficiency, etc.

13. "Corporate stock budget" by which requests for permanent improvements are systematically analyzed and compared with one another and with actual needs, substituted for the sporadic voting of capital charges without regard to need or plan.

14. Early and continued listing of dangers to the city's business methods threatened by the various revised charters of 1911.

15. Questions and facts were presented regarding the city debt which were used by all sides of the city debt controversy and led to permanent settlement of forty-three doubtful questions.

16. Ten million dollars released for reduction of taxes in 1912, by reconciliation of comptroller's and departments' books.

17. The bureau furnished the chairman of the first and second Greater New York Conference on Summer Care of Babies.

18. Investigation of the city's relation to private charitable institutions receiving city funds and to juvenile dependency, leading to sweeping revision of methods by private institutions and by the city.

19. The reorganization of public works, Manhattan saving in two years a million dollars and greatly increasing the quality and quantity of work.

20. Investigation by the commissioner of accounts which led to the removal of Borough President Haffen of the Bronx and to reorganization of his office.

21. For six years aldermanic and Board of Estimate officers have acted upon results of bureau investigations into innumerable proposals, frequently resulting in the abandonment or serious modification of proposed appropriations.

22. Budget-making committees of the Board of Estimate and apportionment have for five years used the bureau's services in studying estimates, drafting questions, etc.

23. The facts, as given by a citizen, on which the plot to sell the city \$700,000 worth of dirt was thwarted and the landscape architect removed, were confirmed and presented by the bureau.

24. Inclusion in all charter revision reports of numerous provisions based upon the bureau's suggestions as to business organization and procedure.

25. A study of tenement house administration through a contribution of \$10,000 by Mr. George H. F. Schrader, which helped secure increased appropriations for removing dark rooms, school sinks, etc.

26. Inclusion of dock department expenses in the annual budget, with a saving the first year of over \$400,000.

27. The publicity work of the Committee for the Reduction of Infant Mortality in connection with the milk stations and infant mortality in the summer of 1911 was conducted by the bureau at the committee's expense.

28. A general acceptance of the proposition that by studying official acts and community needs between election times citizens can guarantee continuous efforts for civic and social betterment.

29. City government is more generally seen to be inevitably either a help or a hindrance to church aims, philanthropy, education and business, according to the attention given to government by churchmen, philanthropists, educators and business men.

President McAneny said at a municipal efficiency dinner, January 4, 1912:

" . . . I might mention a long . . . list to illustrate what can be done upon the administrative side, but I repeat that nine-tenths of it has been the work of the Bureau of Municipal Research and of men within the service who have been inoculated with their ideas, with their enthusiasm, and who have accepted service under me and have worked with them all in the same general direction and with the same general purpose."

On the same occasion Comptroller Prendergast said:

" . . . We want that kind of intelligent criticism. We want it to go on and on and we want the unthinking part of the public to understand the real function of this institution that is trying to build up a better city for all the people."

On the record, of which the above gains are but partial indications, a National Training School for Public Service has been started and is being conducted by the bureau. After examination of these same results by comptrollers, mayors, public-spirited citizens and officials, the administrative research method is now being applied in cities throughout the country by numerous organizations, within and without city and state governments, such as chambers of commerce, taxpayers organizations, women's clubs, boards of aldermen. For example, Comptroller Taussig, of St. Louis, secured a fund of \$25,000 a year for installing an efficiency bureau in his office and put at the head of it Mr. Peter White, who worked in St. Louis first as a representative of the Bureau of Municipal Research in its charter study for the St. Louis Voters' League.

Three other results due to the success of municipal research in New York, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Chicago, etc., which are of inestimable value are:

1. Change in the attitude of accounting houses toward municipal accounting and corresponding increasing demand from municipalities, state and national departments for accounting or efficiency service.

2. Notable change in the attitude of public officers and employees toward their work. Experience has proved now that the public will discriminate between efficient and inefficient service if facts proving efficiency or inefficiency are given to the public. Under the spotlight of publicity respecting methods and results, a new type of man gains leadership in public office; namely, the man who can "make good" to the public. Formerly, the man who was fittest to survive was the man who "made good" with the outside powers of politics, contractors, etc.

3. Universities and technical schools and high schools too, so fast as concrete facts are supplied, will change the content and method of instruction in government so as to prepare students for efficient citizenship between election times.

To launch this program has cost public-spirited men and women in New York \$460,000 since 1906. Citizens in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago and Memphis have spent \$250,000. The President's commission on economy and efficiency has spent roughly

\$200,000. But the near million dollars thus far spent in municipal research is small compared with the millions that are being spent by government agencies in applying efficiency tests to public business, and is a mere bagatelle compared with the hundreds of millions of dollars that are now being spent in a sincere effort on the part of officials and employees to serve the public efficiently.

Municipal research is a method, not a panacea. It aims not to make over either the man in office or the men who vote, but to give men as they are better methods of working for the public and to give the public as it is better methods of watching and judging what their public servants do.

There is not a city in the country where the majority of voters want inefficiency, waste and dishonesty. There is not a city where the majority do not resent incompetence, waste and dishonesty, whenever and wherever they can see it. Municipal research will put a premium on efficiency and economy wherever it is so financed, and so equipped with experts, that it can keep alive, between election times, interest in the reasons for good government and can provide non-partisan, non-political, continuous emphasis upon the requirements, methods and results—as distinct from the personalities and politics—of public business.